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TEN MINUTES CAUTION

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FROM

A PLAIN MAN

TO

HIS FELLOW CITIZENS.

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TEN MINUTES CAUTION,

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IT is, in general, of very little importance to the reader to know who, or what ſort of perſon, the writer of any thing is. But to you, my friends, and fellow citizens, I think it is material to conſider who the men are whoſe writings on public matters are recommended to your peruſal. In this view, you will permit me to tell you ſomething of myſelf. I will firſt tell you what I am not. I am not a foreigner, an alien to this country, who would gratify reſentment as well as pride by throwing it into confuſion. I am not a deſperate and profligate incendiary, whoſe cir-

cumſtances cannot be made worſe by any change, who will take the chance of ſetting the houſe on fire that he may pilfer the furniture while it is burning. I am not a furious enthuſiaſt in religion or politics, who, under pretence of toleration in the one, or liberty in the other, would overturn the eſtabliſhed Church or the eſtabliſhed Conſtitution.—I am none of thoſe, my brethren. I am a plain man, a tradeſman, who, having acquired a competency by his honeſt induſtry, is now winding up his buſineſs, in order to enjoy that competency in eaſe and quiet, in his old age, in the midſt of a virtuous family of his own rearing. I know nothing of great men or Miniſters, and concern myſelf no farther about them than as I think their meaſures are for the intereſt of my country. I care not who ſits at the helm of the ſtate veſſel, provided ſhe be well ſteered. But though I am perfectly independent as to my own circumſtances, yet

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I am dependent as far as this goes, that the happineſs, or the proſpect of the happineſs, of my fellow citizens makes me happy; their unhappineſs, or the fear of their unhappineſs, makes me unhappy.

In this character, and with theſe feelings, I am tempted to uſe my pen, for the firſt time in public, to caution you, my countrymen, againſt the miſchief which ſome men, and ſome writers, of the ſort I have mentioned above, would wiſh to do among you; to beg of you not to endanger the peace and proſperity of yourſelves and your country to gratify the malice, the ambition, or the hopes of gain, which ſuch men entertain, and which they truſt to their own arts and our fillineſs to enable them to accompliſh.

Conſider, my friends, at what time, and in what circumſtances, thoſe men would perſuade us to make a change in

our ſituation. Would any of us think it prudent, in the way of our trade, if our buſineſs were good, our ſhop well frequented, our cuſtomers increaſing, in ſhort, every thing about us in a thriving condition, all at once to alter our *firm*, to change our agents abroad, to diſmiſs our clerks and ſervants at home, and to tell our cuſtomers that we were to deal in a quite different way with them for the future? Would any of us do this? or would not our relations take out a commiſſion of lunacy againſt us if we did? — Juſt as madly, my friends, it appears to me, ſhould we act, if, in the preſent ſituation of our public affairs, we ſhould think of altering that conſtitution under which, by the bleſſing of God, we have attained, and enjoy, our preſent national ſecurity and proſperity.

Thoſe gentlemen wiſh to make court to us by ſetting forth the injuſtice of the in-

equality

equality of condition between us and the great men who have the management of public affairs. For my own part, I don't envy thoſe great men their rank and ſtate. I believe, in my conſcience, I am as happy as any, and much happier than moſt of them. But any man who thinks otherwiſe, and who aſpires to thoſe ſituations, may, if he has induſtry and abilities fit for it, work his way into public office as into other fortunate, or what are called fortunate, ſituations. In this country there is no excluſion of men from ſuch ſituations on account of their inferiority in birth or family; a fellow 'prentice of mine is now a Member of Parliament, and very much reſpected in the Houſe of Commons; but I would not change ſituations with him for all that.

I ſhould be glad to know what advantage we are to get by the levelling of ranks, which thoſe writers would perſuade

ſuade us to wiſh for, by regaining what they call the *Rights of Man.* If they have a mind to go back to the woods again, and live as they ſay men lived in this country two thouſand years ago, let them, in God's name; but I, who am ſitting in a good ſnug parlour, with all my family comforts around me, will rather chuſe to keep as I am. If there is to be any ſociety at all, I preſume ſome muſt neceſſarily be richer and more powerful than others; but if thoſe who have little, are ſecure of it, I ſay, as I ſaid before, they may be as happy as thoſe who have the moſt. As things are at preſent, I find great advantage in the riches and grandeur of ſome of my countrymen. I have a ſet of wealthy cuſtomers who put a great deal of money into my pocket in the year, whoſe expences, ſuitable to their rank and ſituation in life, enable me to enjoy all the ſolid comforts ſuitable to mine.

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I received, ſome time ago, a letter from an old friend and correſpondent at *Manchester*, full of hard words, and in a high-flown ſtile, complaining of the extravagance and luxury of Dukes and Lords, who were no better fleſh and blood than he or I, and aſking me to put down my name to a ſet of reſolutions for correcting that abuſe. I thought at firſt my old friend had been playing upon me, as it was about the *fooling* time of the year; but when I was told that there were ſeriouſly ſuch reſolutions propoſed at Manchester, I wrote a ſerious anſwer. I deſired him to recollect how much of my money had gone through his hands ſince our firſt dealings with one another, and that I believed in my conſcience there was ſcarce a ſingle *neceſſary* in all our accounts; ſo that if *luxury* was to be put down, he muſt ſhut up ſhop. I believe my good friend was aſhamed of himſelf, for he

anſwered

anſwered my next order, and ſaid nothing more of the reſolutions.

My way always is, to let every one live as they pleaſe, provided they live honeſtly, and do their neighbours no harm. I know, and ſo do you, my friends, that none of thoſe Dukes or Lords dare touch a hair of our heads, or a halfpenny of our properties, any more than we can of theirs. Let them have what rank or power they may, the law is ſtronger than them. Indeed I don't believe they have any inclination to wrong or oppreſs any of us; I am not quite ſure if that would be the caſe were our equals and neighbours to get ſuddenly into power. Thoſe great folks have no interference with us, and they have a pride as well as an intereſt in the country's thriving and our thriving with it. But if, for inſtance, my neighbour over the way were to become Judge, I am afraid he would recollect a fooliſh

quarrel

quarrel that happened a few years ago with ſeveral of our pariſhioners, and perhaps juſtice would not be ſo impartially adminiſtered in his hands as we know it is at preſent. As to myſelf, though I think him a good ſort of man in many reſpects, I do not know how he would uſe his new-gotten power, and, for one, I ſhould not like to come within his clutches.

The modern levellers always tell us what we are to gain by their plan, but, my friends, it is neceſſary for us to think what we ſhould loſe by it. Every man in a decent ſituation in life, even if he makes his bread by the ſweat of his brow, has ſomething he can call his own, ſomething he feels comfortable in, and which his way of life has made more ſuitable to him than the fine things of other people in a higher ſphere, which is generally a ſituation of more care than comfort.

You and I, and every man who has ſomething to preſerve for himſelf, or is too honeſt to encroach on his neighbours, will tremble at the effects of throwing looſe every bond of peace and good order. My *Mancheſter* friends have lately had a taſte of the conſequences in the burning of their cotton mills. The ſpinners thought theſe mills were hurtful to the induſtrious poor, though I am told by impartial men, who know the ſubject well, that they have, in truth, been the means of giving bread to thouſands. They ſay that by increaſing our commerce in this article of manufacture, more people of all ages are employed than would have been if no ſuch machinery had been invented—This is a good inſtance of what are the principles lately attempted to be introduced among us; one ſhould not be ſurpriſed if thoſe who ſupport them endeavoured to perſuade us that all theſe improvements are contrary to the rights

of

of man; if they ſucceed, they will have the merit of making men hazard their lives by a breach of the law for no other purpoſe than to aboliſh that on which they depend for the ſubſiſtance of themſelves and their families.—The truth is, I believe, that if ever this new ſyſtem was to take place, the effect would be, that the next day all the rich would be ruined, above half the induſtrious would be ſoon put out of employ, and in a little time all the poor would be ſtarved.

We hear a great deal about the *Americans* and the *French*, and the excellent governments they have eſtabliſhed; and one of the great apoſtles of the new doctrines tells us how much we ſhould profit by adopting the like governments. In the firſt place, I am ſtrongly inclined to ſuſpect the friendſhip of this gentleman's advice. He tells us himſelf that he began by doing this country all the harm in his

power in favour of America; that he formed the ſcheme, during the war with that country, of coming to England, for the purpoſe of broaching his principles; and ſeems to have thought, that if people were mad enough to liſten to him, we ſhould ſoon have been in ſuch a ſituation, that neither America nor any other country would have had any thing to fear from us. — I am told he has ſince reſided principally in France, where he has probably found new reaſons for making this attempt; — and yet this impoſtor now gravely tells you, that this is done for your good, and from his great regard for your welfare; as far as himſelf is concerned he riſks little, as, by all accounts, he has neither property nor reputation to loſe.

This gentleman tells us we have no Conſtitution, and that what we have is wretchedly bad, and that therefore we

ſhould

ſhould overturn it, and get the American or the French conſtitution as faſt as we can. I do not imagine any of my countrymen know what theſe American or French conſtitutions are; and, I confeſs, I hardly think it worth their inquiry while they are happy under our own. I believe, however, the fact is, that the Americans, after they left us, were under great difficulty how to go on at all; luckily for them Mr. Paine was not at hand to preach confuſion; they had ſtill ſome notion left of the Britiſh conſtitution, under which they had ſo long lived, and they had ſenſe enough to conform to it as nearly as they could—the conſequence is, they have gone on tolerably well for ſome time, and if they don't follow worſe examples, I ſtill hope they will do better. As to France, their old government was bad enough, and what never could have exiſted here; what it is now it is difficult to ſay; I am told that, in fact, they have

no

no government at all; and what it will end in he muſt be very wiſe or very bold that will gueſs. The Americans, after they left us, were obliged to make one for themſelves, and what did they do? they took the Britiſh conſtitution for a model as near as circumſtances would allow, and ſo they are doing pretty well, as Mr. Paine is not there to prevent them. The French had a bad conſtitution in many things; it might therefore be proper to alter or amend it; but they thought themſelves too wiſe to follow us, as the Americans had done, and ſo they fell to work on Mr. Paine's *Rights of Man*, and what fine work they have made of it we all know. But whether their preſent confuſion and diſtreſs ſhall at laſt ſettle into ſomething like our government, or, after a great deal of bloodſhed, lead to ſomething worſe than they ſuffered before, what is that to us? We have long found the good effects of *our* own conſtitution,

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and certainly never more than at preſent, we have therefore no need of trying experiments to mend it. If my neighbour be in a fever, his family do right to get him an apothecary and phyſician, to have him phyſicked, and blooded, and bliſtered; but am I, in perfect health, to undergo all thoſe miſerable operations becauſe I am told my neighbour has been ſomewhat the better for them, though ſtill in agonies and convulſions? much leſs if I have reaſon to think theſe very preſcriptions are what have brought him to the brink of the grave. My friends, it is only by puzzling us with hard words that they can hope to impoſe on us; let the caſe be fairly ſtated, as between man and man, and it is impoſſible we ſhould be blind to the folly and the danger of it.

Mr. Paine is always endeavouring to impoſe upon us by the *economy* of his plans. He tells us we are oppreſſed and ruined by taxes; and he propoſes, if we

will let him make a new conſtitution for us, to ſave us a world of expence, by turning adrift all the preſent ſervants of Government, and having only a certain number of officers, by whom all the buſineſs of the nation is to be done. Our taxes, (one half of which were laid on to pay the debt of the American war, in which Mr. Paine was ſo active againſt us,) to be ſure, are heavy, and I am glad to find that our preſent managers have begun to take off ſome of them; but I don't find we have been ruined even by theſe taxes, on the contrary, we have been thriving apace under the preſent government, though our debts and neceſſary public expences oblige us to pay what we do at preſent. But what is the reaſon we pay any of theſe expences? becauſe the buſineſs of a nation, like that of an individual, cannot be done without paying the ſervants it neceſſarily employs. Mr. Paine does not attempt to prove that the ſervants he propoſes would be ſufficient to do the

buſineſs, but has only made the diſcovery that if you had fewer ſervants at leſs wages it would coſt you leſs. This may be very true; but if any body were to adviſe a farmer to part with his labourers, or a manufacturer with his workmen, under pretence of diminiſhing his expences, and it appeared that he did this without conſidering the extent and manner of cultivating the farm, or the nature and profit of the manufacture, do you think that either would be fooliſh enough to take advice? if they did the conſequence would be, that at the end of the year the farmer would be turned out for not paying his rent, and the manufacturer would become bankrupt.

Mr. Paine talks as if all men were philoſophers like himſelf; but even philoſophers *like Mr. Paine* can preach one thing and practiſe another; can have a great deal about the *Rights of Man*, and about juſtice and virtue, in their mouths; yet

do a great deal of wrong, and ſwindle and cheat, and give juſtice and virtue the ſlip in their lives and their conduct *.

Mr. Paine, though he would have no objection to ſet people looſe to rob and cut one another's throats, is a great pretender to humanity, and therefore gives us a fine plan for providing for the poor and the aged. I don't grudge what I pay to the poor, though I have heard ſome wiſe and good men ſay, that, even in the way it is given them at preſent, it does them often more harm than good, by making them idle and worthleſs, inſtead of being induſtrious and ſober. But Mr. Paine's plan would ſet them all idle at once, and ſo make us pay for that wretchedneſs and vice which would be the ſure effects of their idleneſs, and, after all, make the condition of the poor themſelves

* Mr. Paine is ſaid to be endeavouring to perſuade his friends, that a groſs violation of the rights of man was committed the other day, when he was arreſted for a juſt debt.

worſe

worſe than it ever was before. What would my *Mancheſter* friends ſay to that, or what would the thouſands of their workmen ſay, whom they now make comfortable and happy by the manufactures in which they employ them? Would not the certain conſequence be, that the government would be very ſoon unable to make the poor any allowance at all, becauſe it is only from the induſtry of the nation that the public income is drawn. The nation would then be a *pauper* itſelf. This, I believe, Mr. Paine, notwithſtanding his boaſted humanity, would be very glad to ſee, for the ſake of thoſe good French friends, whom he plainly tells us he wiſhes "ſurrounded with revolutions." This would be a revolution indeed; if inſtead of the preſent ſituation of Great Britain, its manufactures thriving, its trade increaſing, its wealth abounding, its debt in a fair way of being paid, its credit high, and its power reſpectable, beyond thoſe of any other country in the world,

world, it ſhould be reduced by ſeditious, profligate, or miſguided men, to a ſtate of poverty, weakneſs, contempt and miſery.

My friends, I am no philoſopher, no fine writer, though I got a tolerable education at the Charter Houſe, and remember a little of my *grammar* as well as Mr. Paine. But without philoſophy or fine writing, I may venture to beſeech you, not to throw away all the bleſſings you poſſeſs on a wild experiment to find ſomething better, and that too on the authority of people who have an intereſt in miſleading you. For my own part, I am come to an age that cannot look for living long to enjoy our preſent national proſperity; but I have children and grandchildren; and I cannot bear to think, that folly or wickedneſs ſhould endanger the happineſs which I hope they will inherit, by having the good fortune to be born under the *Britiſh Conſtitution.*

THE END.

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